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A CATECHISM ON SYPHILIS

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CATECHISM ON SYPHILIS

Q. What is syphilis?

A. Syphilis is an infection, just as a cold is an infection, caused by a definite germ.

Q. What are the dangers of syphilis?

A. Syphilis is a killer, not in the early stages of the infection, but fifteen or twenty years later. Before it kills, it may cripple the men or women infected, blind them, drive them insane, or make them chronic invalids. The person with syphilis usually does not realize what the future holds, for the disease has no alarming signs when one is first infected. Syphilis also can cripple, blind or kill the unborn child.

Q. How does one get syphilis?

A. One must have direct contact with a person in the early infectious stage of syphilis to become infected. This includes kissing.

Q. Can syphilis be passed through foods or any other way?

A. Syphilis is never transmitted through foods, on toilet seats or in any other way than by direct contact.

Q. Is all syphilis always infectious?

A. Only early syphilis is infectious. Syphilis of less than four years' duration is considered infectious, and then only by direct contact. If persons have had syphilis for more than four years they are considered to be non-infectious.

Q. Should patients in the early stage of syphilis be quarantined?

A. This is not necessary if these patients are placed under proper treatment.

Q. Can syphilis patients who are under proper treatment be allowed to work as maids.

A. Yes, a syphilis patient who is under treatment and observation can work at any occupation but must continue under observation until definitely discharged by a physician.

Q. How much treatment is required to make a syphilis patient non-infectious?

A. With modern treatment the patient is made non-infectious in a matter of days. He or she must remain under observation, however, to detect any signs of relapse because if relapse occurs the patient is again infectious.

Q. How long is treatment necessary to effect a cure of syphilis?

A. With modern handling, the period of time under active treatment is very short. After active treatment, however, the patients must remain under observation for at least a year before they can be assured of a cure.

Q. Why will not all syphilis respond to treatment so satisfactorily?

A. All active syphilis usually does respond to treatment satisfactorily. It must be realized, however, that damage already done to the vital organs such as the heart and brain cannot be reversed. Treatment will, however, prevent further damage to these vital organs.

Q. What is the purpose of laws requiring premarital or prenatal examinations for syphilis?

A. The premarital examination is performed to protect the uninfected partner. The examination of pregnant women is required because the only way an unborn baby can get syphilis is through an infected mother. If routine blood tests for syphilis were done on all pregnant women and proper treatment administered to those found infected, syphilis of the new-born would soon become a thing of the past.

Q. What is the reason for the present nation-wide campaign against syphilis?

A. There are three reasons. First, medical research has finally found a means of arresting syphilis. Second, prompt treatment of contagious syphilis makes the sufferer non-contagious, and so prevents further spread of the infection. Third, if syphilis can be checked, the vast sums of money spent in caring for victims of late syphilis can be saved.

Q. Is treatment and cure of syphilis expensive?

A. Considering the seriousness of the disease with all its frightening complications the modern treatment of syphilis is inexpensive. For those who cannot afford private treatment, facilities do exist everywhere for the proper treatment and handling of syphilis cases.

Q. Is there any sound reason for calling syphilis a venereal disease?

A. No. Syphilis is a disease of the entire body. The venereal label should be abandoned, for it is responsible for a false conception regarding the disease.

Q. Are syphilis and gonorrhea caused by the same germ?

A. No. Syphilis and gonorrhea may be contracted at the same time, but syphilis does not manifest itself for several weeks, whereas gonorrhea becomes evident in two or three days.

Q. During what period of life is syphilis most commonly acquired?

A. Syphilis is most prevalent in the age group twenty to thirty.

Q. What does a positive Wassermann mean?

A. A positive Wassermann means that syphilis probably is present. It is not proof of infectiousness. As strong a Wassermann reaction can exist in a person who has had syphilis thirty years as in a person infected for only three or four months. The former is non-infectious; the latter is infectious.

Q. Is penicillin used in the treatment of syphilis?

A. Yes.

Q. Will penicillin cure syphilis if given at the proper time?

A. Yes.

Q. What is the most appropriate time to start treatment by means of penicillin?

A. As soon as possible after the first symptom of syphilis appears.

Q. Will penicillin stop the progress of syphilis if it is given after the disease has become non-infectious?

A. Yes. Penicillin will stop the advance of syphilis no matter when it is administered.

Q. Presumably there are a large number of persons who are infected with syphilis. What does the State Department of Health have to offer to make such persons non-infectious or to cure them of syphilis?

A. A system of free clinics has been in operation by the State Department of Health for a third of a century. This free service is offered to all persons who are not able to pay for private examination and treatment. No charge is made for such service.